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Out-of-body travels nothing new for Afton man

OUT-OF-BODY TRAVELER — Robert A. Monroe of Afton is considered a pioneer in out-of-body travels. He is the author of "Journeys Out of the Body" and operates Monroe Institute of Applied Sciences. (Photo by Meredith Barkley)

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first of a two-part series on one man's experiences in out-of-body travel.

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AFTON — The most interesting trips Robert A. Monroe takes don't cost a cent. In fact, he couldn't pay for them even if he wanted to.

Monroe, who has been described as the founding father of out-of-body travel, visits locales unbound by time and space. He has been called psychic, sensitive, freak, heretic and a parapsychologist by persons who find it necessary to categorize things they don't understand.

He ignores the labels. He's heard them many times during the 20 years he has traveled out-of-body.

He claims his book, "Journeys Out of the Body," has received serious consideration because he is "well grounded" in the material world of the business community — not a guru spending his life in a mountain top pagoda.

Nevertheless, Monroe's life has been different.

In 1958, he was a successful business executive. He was vice president and director of Mutual Broadcasting System, Inc., in New York, and had spent 20 years in the industry creating and producing 400 radio and television network programs.

It was during the spring of that year things began happening to him he couldn't explain.

He and his family were living in a rural area in upstate New York. Everything about their lives was normal, as he recalls, except his experiments with data learning during sleep. He used himself as the guinea pig.

He still doesn't know if the experiments had anything to do with it, but without warning his astral body began leaving his physical body and traveling to "energy systems" unexplainable in terms of the realities most take for granted.

At first he was frightened. He began to believe he was dying. He underwent a complete physical examination, but his doctor found nothing wrong.

He then visited a psychologist friend who explained such out-of-body experiences are fairly common among those practicing the Eastern religions. What had occurred to Monroe, the friend insisted, was nothing to be concerned about.

"It took quite a while for me to acclimate myself to the idea this was not the beginning of a death experience," he said during a recent interview.

Monroe found the idea of traveling out of his physical body via a second body bizarre, but interesting.

"In retrospect," he wrote, "I still cannot envisage having dropped the matter entirely at any time. It may be that I could not have done so if I tried."

At first, Monroe's astral body would lift out of the physical and bounce lightly on the ceiling or float around the bedroom. Then it began leaving his home, traveling to other parts of his neighborhood.

The limits of his exploration stretched further until he began visiting the West Coast during out-of-body jaunts.

He would test himself by visiting in the physical locations he had visited while out-of-body and checking the configuration of the scenes he had witnessed. He found they were exactly the same.

He would drop in on conversations between some of his friends and later, to their amazement, describe for them what had been said.

At first his trips were pretty much confined to the physical world, but that changed.

Soon he began visiting places unbound by physical restraints.

During these trips, Monroe generally had a specific destination in mind.

But even that changed.

"About 10 years ago I made what to me was an important decision," he said. "I began to realize that this consciousness was totally inadequate in its knowledge and experience to use properly this out-of-body state.

"I made a decision that I would not limit what I did in the out-of-body state to the framework of this consciousness alone."

During these trips he began releasing his "total self," no longer trying to control his astral body.

Trying to describe his experiences is frustrating for Monroe.

"Part of the difficulty is to translate it into words that are limiting and to time-space concepts which are also limiting," he said.

The best he can do is draw on the frequency concept for a comparison. Visiting other "energy systems" or "reality systems," he said, is like switching to another frequency on the radio.

(See TRAVELS, Page 2)

Next: How real are the experiences Monroe claims to have had? Can anyone have the same experiences? The second part of this series, to be published Monday, will explore these questions.